

CHAPTER 6. WESTERN PLACER COUNTY AGRICULTURAL LAND CONSERVATION CRITERIA

The conservation of agricultural lands in Placer County will be accomplished through landowner-initiated conservation easement transactions. Each potential acquisition will be evaluated through a two-tiered approach: a “coarse filter” analysis of GIS data will be followed by an on-site analysis of property characteristics and resources. The Placer County Agricultural Commission shall undertake this review and advise the Placer County Board of Supervisors regarding specific easement transactions. The Placer County Agricultural Commission uses the criteria described below to evaluate requests for conservation easements or property acquisitions on agricultural lands.

Category	Score
Soils and Department of Conservation Classification (15 points possible)	
Class I or II (7 points)	
Class III or IV (5 points)	
Class V or VI (3 points)	
Class VII or VIII (2 points)	
Prime Farmland (8 points)	
Farmland of Statewide Importance (8 points)	
Unique Farmland (7 points)	
Farmland of Local Importance (7 points)	
Grazing Land (6 points)	
Not Classified (0 points)	
Water Availability (25 points possible)	
Water Source: _____	
Water Quantity: _____ (10 points maximum)	
Water Reliability (15 points maximum)	
Size and Viability of Operation (15 points possible)	
Acreage: _____ (10 points maximum)	
Current Viability of Operation (5 points maximum)	
Adjacent Land in PROTECTED Ownership or Easement (25 points possible)	
Compatibility with Surrounding Land Uses	
Surrounded by other commercial agricultural lands (5 points)	
Surrounded by rural residential lands (3 points)	
Proximity to Other Protected Lands	
Adjacent land in public ownership or agricultural conservation easement (10 points)	
Within 1 mile of land in public ownership/agricultural conservation easement (7 points)	
Within 2 miles of land in public ownership/agricultural conservation easement (5 points)	
Opportunity to work with more than one landowner	
Opportunity to work with 5 or more contiguous landowners (5 points)	
Opportunity to work with 3-5 contiguous landowners (4points)	
Opportunity to work with 2 contiguous landowners (3 points)	
Immediacy of threat to property (5 points maximum)	
Potential to Protect or Enhance Other Resources (20 points possible)	
Important wildlife habitat (for threatened, endangered, or special status species) (3 points maximum)	
Wetlands/Riparian Zone (3 points maximum)	
Scenic values (4 points maximum)	
Historical/cultural values (2 points maximum)	
Public safety (floodplains) (4 points maximum)	
Urban edge buffers (3 points maximum)	
Outdoor recreation (if compatible) (1 point maximum)	

Notes:

Soils and Department of Conservation (DOC) Classification: Soil classifications are taken from the Placer County Soils Survey prepared by the United States Department of Agriculture. DOC classification is taken from the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program. Both classifications are currently available to Placer County in map format.

Water Availability: The source of water influences the quantity and reliability of water available for a particular operation, as well as the types of crops that can be produced. A maximum of 10 points is possible if the property has sufficient water to produce all of the crops that it is capable of producing given soil, location and climate. An additional 15 points maximum is possible if this water supply is available in all by the driest years (as defined by the Department of Water Resources). Rangeland that has sufficient stock water shall receive the maximum 10 points for Water Quantity and additional 15 points for Water Reliability if this water is available even in the driest years. Generally, agricultural water supplied by the Nevada Irrigation District is considered to be more reliable than agricultural water supplied by the Placer County Water Agency.

Size and Viability of Operation: Operations will be awarded the following points based on acreage:

300+ acres	10 points
150 – 300 acres	8 points
50 – 150 acres	6 points
10 – 50 acres	4 points
Less than 10 acres	2 points

Viability of an operation is measured by its current income-producing ability. This is a somewhat subjective evaluation.

Adjacent Land in PROTECTED Ownership or Easement: Lands that are adjacent to other protected lands are a higher priority for agricultural conservation easements, as are lands that are surrounded by other commercial agricultural lands. This helps to eliminate challenges arising from surrounding urban and suburban development. Opportunities to work with groups of landowners in a specific region are also preferred.

Potential to protect other resources: This category is somewhat subjective, but the following guidelines apply:

- *Important wildlife habitat*— Vernal pools, endangered species habitat and oak woodlands are examples of important wildlife habitat that rank highly in this category.
- *Wetlands/Riparian Zone* Opportunities to protect wetlands and riparian areas by keeping land in agriculture rank highly in this category.
- *Scenic values* Land that is part of a community's viewshed ranks highly in this category. Proximity to public roadways and visibility from suburban and urban areas should guide the assignment of value in this category.

- *Historical/cultural values* Farms that have significant historical or cultural values might include operations that were established in the 19th Century or operations that otherwise represent a unique cultural aspect of Placer County.
- *Public safety (floodplains)* Some farms may provide public safety benefit by removing potential development from floodplains. Farms and ranches may also provide fuel breaks and other wildfire protection benefits.
- *Urban edge buffers* Farms that preserve distinct urban edges rank highly in this category.
- *Outdoor recreation* Farms and ranches that provide outdoor recreation opportunities (either public or private) rank highly in this category.